

Aeschylus

The seven against Thebes of
Aeschylus

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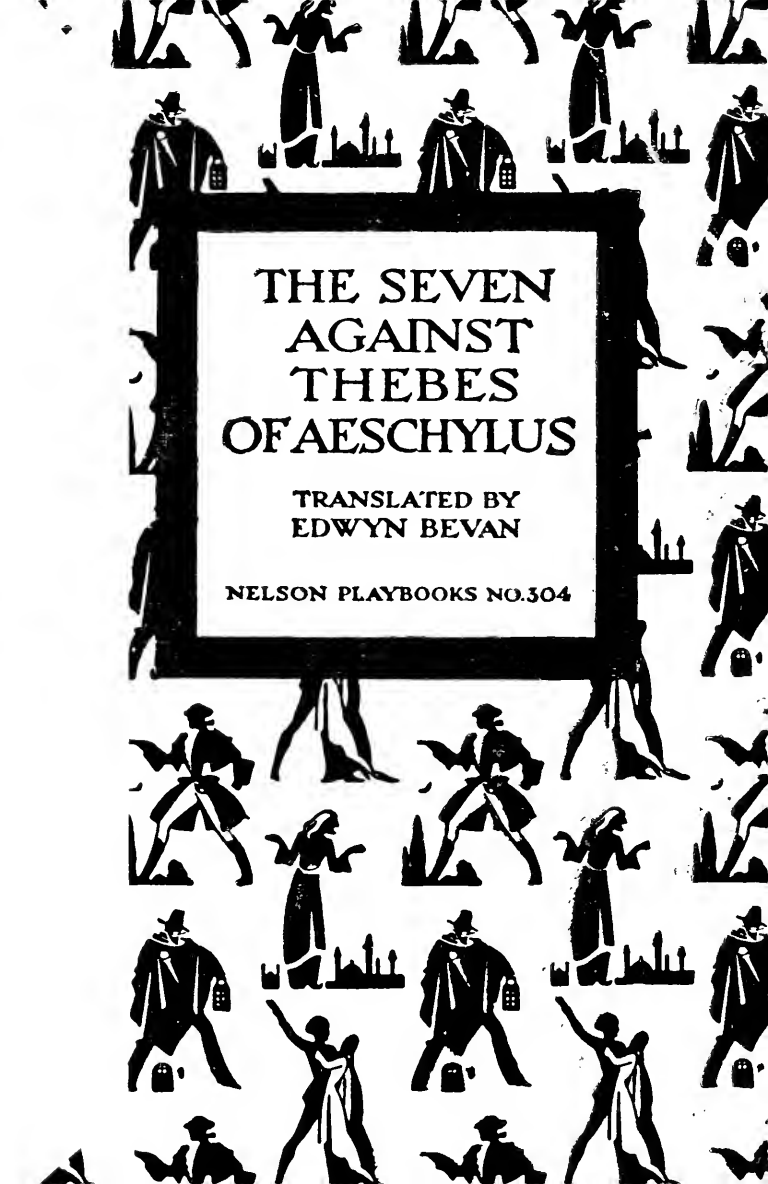
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THE SEVEN
AGAINST
THEBES
OF AESCHYLUS

TRANSLATED BY
EDWYN BEVAN

NELSON PLAYBOOKS NO. 304

The Nelson Playbooks

Edited by JOHN HAMPDEN, M.A.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

No. 304

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The Seven Against Thebes
of
Æschylus

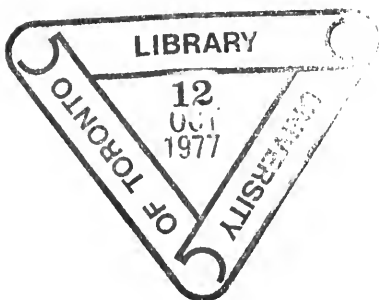
RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

EDWYN BEVAN

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PREFACE

OUT of the old festivals of the wine-god, Dionysos, in which songs had been sung by a chorus, dealing with stories of the legendary past, there was developed at Athens, in the fifth century B.C., the *drama*, in which the old stories were acted. But since the Attic drama was still in theory a piece of religious ritual, carried out in honour of Dionysos, the chorus was retained as a form prescribed by tradition, though its action had somehow to be fitted into the action of the play. It was now given the rôle of a crowd or group of subordinate persons attached to one or other of the principal characters of the play, or belonging to the place which was the supposed scene of the play—a company of old men or sailors or maidens or slaves, or whatever the case might require. But the chorus could never take a very active part; its rôle was mainly that of lookers-on, making comments on the actions and speeches of the characters in the play; it might express very decided sympathies with one side or another where the play was a story of strife, and act as adviser or confidant to some person in the play.

It continued to chant songs of some length; but these were worked into the substance of the play, expressing the feelings aroused in the old men or maidens, or whoever the chorus might represent, by the situation of the moment, or calling to mind other old myths connected with the subject of the drama. These choric songs were also used to mark the divisions between the successive episodes of the drama, very much as is done by dropping the curtain in a modern play: the other actors, whilst they were being sung, remained behind the scenes, and the chorus had the orchestra all to itself. In the fifth century B.C. there seems to have been a wooden stage in the theatre of Dionysos at Athens. The tiers of marble seats rose on the hillside round a semi-circular space, in the middle of which was an altar. On the other side of this space, facing the audience, was the wall which formed the background for the play. It had the

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appearance of the façade of a house with a great door in the middle. Since in the majority of Greek plays the action is supposed to take place in front of some house, this façade served for the royal palace in Mycenæ or Thebes, or for a chief's hut on the Trojan shore, or whatever abode was postulated by the story acted. Through the great door were made the entrances and exits of the persons from and into the interior of the palace or house. There were also doors right and left of the back wall, through which the exits and entrances were made when persons were going elsewhere than into the house or coming from elsewhere than from the interior. The semicircular space in front of the house was called the *orchestra*, which means "place for dancing." It was in this space that from the time of their entry, nearly always after the opening speech, or first few speeches, of the play, the chorus stood or moved about for the rest of the play. Some of their chanting was accompanied by rhythmic movements and evolutions round or near the central altar, which may be described as "dancing," though, of course, very unlike what we call "dancing" to-day—more like some Oriental dancing. This dancing is indicated by the terms "strophe" and "antistrophe" attached to the choric songs. The "strophe" was a series of rhythmical movements corresponding with the metre of the song, which had to be precisely repeated in the "antistrophe," perhaps in a reversed direction. The large semicircular space gave plenty of room for the movements of the chorus apart from those of the actors proper, who took their station immediately in front of the back wall. All this makes it extraordinarily difficult to reproduce a Greek play in a modern theatre. Since there is no orchestra, the chorus has to be on the stage, where it crowds the actors uncomfortably: also, since we have no traditional associations with a dancing like that of the ancient drama, the chanting and movements of the chorus cannot mean to us what they did to a fifth-century Greek, and in nearly all modern reproductions of Greek plays which I have seen in ordinary theatres, the chorus is a rather tiresome element which seems to clog the action of the play, and which one wishes away. Probably these difficulties could be got over by clever stage management. Another feature of the ancient drama strange to us, which it is probably best in modern reproductions to eliminate, was the wearing of

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masks. No actor showed his real face: there were no actresses. All the actors and all the members of the chorus were men: if they took the rôle of women, they wore masks and dresses to suit. In tragedy the actors also wore boots with very thick soles to raise their stature above the common. All this, because unfamiliar to our eye, looks so unnatural to-day that it destroys the appeal of the play if it is attempted.

In the worship of the ancient Greek gods it was common to have contests of various kinds, athletic or musical. The fifth-century plays were all exhibited in the theatre of Dionysos in competitive contests between different dramatic poets at the festivals of the god. Each poet had to get together a chorus some time before the festival and "teach" it. He had also to teach the two or three or four actors required. Not more than four actors were ever required, because the wearing of masks allowed the same actor to take different parts. Each poet presented a series of three tragedies, commonly spoken of by scholars to-day as a "trilogy," followed by a fourth play of a lighter, semi-comic kind, called a "satyric" play, because the chorus in it normally consisted of the mythical goat-legged beings whom the Greeks called "satyroi." Performances must have gone on all day, perhaps into dusk (it is noticeable that torchlight shows or playing with fire were a feature at the end of the great trilogy of Æschylus and apparently in some of the lost satyric plays). At the end the judges gave one of the competing poets the prize.

The three great Athenian tragedians, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, were by no means the only dramatic poets of their day, and sometimes they were beaten in the contest by other men who are only names to us to-day. But it is only of those three that plays are preserved, seven out of the ninety said to have been composed by Æschylus, seven of Sophocles, and eighteen or (if the Rhesus is genuine) nineteen of Euripides. Æschylus, the eldest of the three, was born probably somewhere about 524 B.C. and he died in 456 or 455 B.C.; Euripides, the youngest, was born in 480 B.C., so that he must have seen the plays of Æschylus, as a lad, when they were first presented. But though so near in time, there is an immense difference of character between the plays of Æschylus and the plays of Euripides. For with Euripides a modernist fashion set in. It must be

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remembered that Greek tragedies, with very few exceptions, dealt not with contemporary life, but with the stories of a supposed heroic age long past, as familiar to all the spectators as the Bible stories were to our fathers, seen transfigured through a halo of legend. Euripides tried to present the characters of these stories in a way which assimilated them more, in their mentality and language and behaviour, to the real men and women of his own time, and in so doing he provoked violent protest and ridicule from old-fashioned people. Æschylus is still primitive and solemn, his imagination belonging to a world not ours, in which men stand awed before dark tremendous Powers; his language is built up with rich, sonorous, poetic words remote from the language of every day, a language which was to contemporary speech very much what the language of the Bible and of Milton is to our common speech. As compared with Euripides, Æschylus was stiff and archaic and *naïf*, but he had the impressiveness of ancient dignity. His mind was steeped in religion, in the sense of awe regarding the unseen Powers; sometimes he seems to come nearer than any other Greek writer to the Old Testament. It is especially the idea of curses working themselves out in some great house of the ancient time, generation after generation, which gives the note of his tragedies. Man, in a type heroically idealized, is seen contending with this dark Power, and contending often, for all his splendid efforts, in vain. This Power of destiny or vengeance is personified in the imagined figure of the Erinyes, or, in the plural, the Erinyes, called by the Romans "Furies," the goddesses who are behind all the successive catastrophes, and who hunt the guilty man, or the man of the accursed family, to his doom. It is akin to the idea of the "weird" in northern mythology. The origin of the curse in the Greek legendary stories is some offence committed against the gods—disobedience to an oracle or proud boasting words: Æschylus, in his profound reverence for the ancestral gods, had as great a horror as a pious Hebrew of the "mouth that speaketh great things."

The play here translated was the third in a trilogy dealing with the royal house of Thebes in the legendary past, upon whom a curse had rested since the disobedience of Laius—a story dark with the horror of family bloodshed, incest, and suicide. The first two plays of the trilogy, *Laius* and *Œdipus*, are lost; also the satyric play, *The Sphinx*, which

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followed *The Seven against Thebes*. The trilogy was first presented in the theatre of Dionysos in the year 467 B.C., and on this occasion Æschylus won the first prize. *The Seven against Thebes* is a poem which, beyond any other Greek play, brings before us the terror and the splendour of ancient war. It is full of the sound of shields clashing, towering figures of an age when men were half-divine, meeting in battle under a sky charged with imminent doom. It is, of course, not exactly the war of the poet's own time, which Æschylus knew well enough as an old warrior who had fought at Marathon in 490 against the Persians: it is war idealized, as it appeared to the fifth-century Greeks in Homer and the other old epics. Probably the part of the play which for the generations following that of Æschylus gave it abiding interest, and secured its preservation, is the highly worked-up description of the seven chiefs and of the different devices on their shields. All this belongs rather to Homeric warfare than to fifth-century Greek warfare. One feature, however, in war, as the play shows it, was true of war in the poet's own time—the horrors which attended the capture of a city by a hostile army. War in the twentieth century A.D. seems to have horrors added to it which ancient warfare did not know; it is fair to remember that ancient warfare had also horrors from which modern warfare is free. When Æschylus wrote, in the wars between the Greek city-states it was common for the people victorious to carry off into slavery the whole population of a conquered town. When, therefore, the Theban maidens in our play express almost hysterical terror at the possible fate awaiting them if the city is taken, that would have had a note of dreadful actuality to the first hearers of the play. It is because Eteocles the king stands between such a fate and his people that he appears a figure of heroic intrepidity.

As the ancient Greek plays come down to us in mediæval manuscripts there are no stage directions, no notes even of "enter" and "exit"; nothing but the letters signifying the several speakers. In the two plays which Swinburne wrote imitating ancient Greek plays, *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Erechtheus*, in order to make them look as like Greek plays as possible, he omitted all stage directions, and in the first edition of my translation of this play of Æschylus, published by Edward Arnold in 1912, I followed the same plan. Readers of the translations of Greek plays, who have

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no acquaintance with the original, should understand that all the stage directions they find inserted are made up by the translator at his fancy or discretion, as they seem to him required by the situation, and represent nothing in the Greek. But it is likely that for such readers they often make the action of the play more rapidly intelligible, and in a large number of cases they show what a scholar, by his study of the text, sees that the action accompanying the words must be in order to correspond with the poet's intention. In this small edition of my translation I have accordingly inserted stage-directions throughout.

E. B.

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The "Antigone" of Sophocles, which is published in this series of Playbooks in Professor Lewis Campbell's verse translation, also dramatizes (somewhat differently) the old story how Antigone buried Polynices in defiance of the State, and carries on the story until after Antigone's death.

OF THE ARGUMENT

CADMUS the Phœnician, coming into the land of Bœotia in Greece, slew a great serpent whose dwelling was near the stream Dirce. With the teeth of the serpent he sowed a field, and there sprang up warriors out of the ground, who fell to fighting together, so that a great part of them were slain. Certain, however, remained alive, and together with these he built the city of Cadmea, called afterwards Thebes, upon the streams Dirce and Ismenus. The children of those warriors which had sprung from the serpent's teeth, called the Sown Ones, had ever chief honour among the Cadmeans in after time. Moreover, the God Ares gave Cadmus to wife his daughter Harmonia, whom the Cyprian goddess Aphrodite had borne him, wherefore Ares was reckoned as their special protector by the Cadmeans and Aphrodite as in a sort their mother. Cadmus also established in his city the worship of Athene, giving her the surname Onca. Two generations after Cadmus the city came into the power of Amphion and Zethus, whose father was none other than Zeus himself, and Amphion built a wall about it by the magic of his harping, a great wall with seven gates.

When Laius, the great-grandson of Cadmus, was King of Thebes, the oracle of Apollo at Delphi foretold evil, unless he died without issue. But Laius, being disobedient, begat a son. Then there came to him a word of divination that this babe should be the slayer of his father and should take his own mother to wife. Wherefore Laius, willing that the child should die, but not willing to kill him, cast him forth upon the mountains.

OF THE ARGUMENT

The child, however, was found by a shepherd and taken to the house of the King of Corinth, and he was reared up in Corinth, being called Œdipus, and held to be the King of Corinth's son. When Œdipus was come to man's estate he journeyed to Thebes, which at that time was sore afflicted by a she-monster, the Sphinx, who ravaged the land for so long as the Cadmeans could not read her riddle, and as many as went to her and sought to read her riddle but could not, she devoured. As Œdipus drew near Thebes he met King Laius on the way, and, falling into a quarrel with him, smote him so that he died, not knowing that it was his father. After this the Cadmeans in distress proclaimed that whoever should read the riddle of the Sphinx should be King of Thebes and take the dead king's queen to wife. And Œdipus guessing the riddle, the Sphinx slew herself, and Œdipus became King of Thebes and married the dead king's queen, not knowing that she was his mother. Of her he had two sons, Eteocles and Polynices,* and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. But at last Œdipus discovered the truth. Then, in anguish of spirit, he put out his own eyes. After this, being displeased with his sons because they gave him not such sustenance as he desired, he cursed them, praying that they might *divide the inheritance by means of iron* and might *possess so much land as should suffice for a grave*. When Œdipus was dead, the brothers quarrelled, and Eteocles drove Polynices out of the city. Polynices then betook himself to Adrastus, King of Argos, and persuaded Adrastus to bring him back to the land of the Cadmeans with an army. Wherefore King Adrastus marched with Polynices against Thebes, having under him six great chiefs of the Argives, and the Argives overran the country and laid siege to the city, the Cadmeans fighting against them under the kingship of Eteocles. And here beginneth the action of the play.

* "Polynices" in Greek means "Man of much strife." See page 42.

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THE PERSONS

ETEOCLES.

A SPY, A BRINGER OF TIDINGS.

ANTIGONE.

ISMENE.

A HERALD.

CHORUS OF CADMEAN VIRGINS.

The scene is a public place in Thebes, near a sanctuary wherein are seen images of Zeus, Ares, Poseidon, Apollo, Hera, Pallas Athene, Artemis, and Aphrodite.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

[*The scene of the play is an open space before the royal palace in Thebes, which city Æschylus in this play always calls by what, according to tradition, was its older name, Cadmea.*

As first represented in the theatre of Dionysos, the palace door probably opened on to a wooden stage higher than the orchestra in which the crowd at the opening of the play, and the chorus later on, stood or moved. Certainly, if the play were put on the modern stage, it would be almost necessary that the palace door should be raised by the height of a few steps above the ground in front, so that the King, when he addresses the crowd or the chorus, should stand well above it. Similarly, at the close of the play the Herald would stand at the top of the palace steps to make his proclamation. Somewhere in front of the palace is a sanctuary—an altar or an assemblage of altars—dedicated to the eight tutelary gods of the city, Zeus the king of the gods, Ares the war-god, Poseidon the sea-god, Apollo, Hera the wife of Zeus, Pallas Athene, Artemis the twin-sister of Apollo, and Aphrodite the goddess of love, called also Kypris, "the Cyprian," because of her great temple in Cyprus. In or above this sanctuary are images of the eight gods—curious stiff archaic shapes; even in the days of Æschylus Greek art was still stiff and archaic, and these are images strange and ancient, belonging, it is supposed, to a time very long before. No doubt the altar which, we have seen, stood in the middle of the orchestra would have been fitted out for the purposes of

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the play to represent this sanctuary with its eight quaint images.

When the play opens the space in front of the palace is occupied by groups of men of all ages, looking anxiously towards the great door of the palace. The door opens and Eteocles, the king, comes forth. He is dressed in long and splendid robes, and carries a long staff or sceptre in his hand. He wears no crown, because a crown was not, with the Greeks, an emblem of royalty: possibly he wears a band round his head, tied behind, with the ends hanging down, which the Greeks called a "diadem." He stands just outside the door and addresses the crowd:]

ETEOCLES

People of Cadmus, he must wield his word
Home to the instant's need, who, set beside
The city's helm, deviseth of her way,
Hand on the tiller and lids refrain'd from sleep.
For if good fall, the praise therefor is God's ;
But if there come—may't never, I pray !—mischance,
Then one man's name shall wax in sound, to fill
The city and all men's mouths, and Eteocles
Be toss'd in a wild surf and clamour of tongues—
Wails, malisons, whereof may he, whose name
Is Zeus Forfender, be Forfender indeed
Unto this city of Cadmean men !
And unto you, O people, I say—to him
That is not yet full man, and him the years
Have minish'd somewhat from the man that was,
And him whose loins have manhood whole in them,
Whose body is big and fed with lusty sap,
All of you, every age, as comely is,
Help ye this city, help the sanctuaries
Of our own gods, that they may keep for ever
Their worship unprofaned, your little ones,
And this earth, mother of us and nurse and friend.
For she it was, when we were pitiful

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Slight crawling things, that on her sustinent breast,
Giving glad welcome to all toil that came,
Did nurse us up, to stand in such an hour
As this, the people of her soil, complete
In arms and heart to bear them, faithful found.
And hitherto, behold, God's will hath leant
Rather to our salvation : yea, though siege
Hath held us wall-emboss'd these many days,
Our warfare hath not wanted grace of heaven.
But now the seer hath spoken, he to whom
All feather'd things are given for flock, whose ears
And spirit read, without the office of fire,
By some sure craft the wise way of the birds—
He, master of such-like oracles, hath shown
Great battle toward of all the Achæan power,
Night-publish'd, levell'd at the city's life.
Up then to the battlements with all tools of war !
To the gateway-castles ! Up, each man, I say !
Beset the breastworks : tarry not : take post
Within the fabric of the towers, or stand
At the issuing of the gates, and bear good heart :
Fear not o'ermuch the outlandish rabble : God
Shall make the ending good. Myself withal
Have sent out spies, perusers of the host,
Whose going, I trow, not vain is : taught of these
I shall not be amazed by any guile.

[*The crowd disperses and goes out right and left. Enter
from the direction of one of the city gates the Spy. He
does obeisance to the King, and speaks :*]

THE SPY .

King of this people, good lord Eteocles,
Lo, I bear back to thee the very shape
Of things wrought yonder in the host : mine eyes
Have seen them and my lips shall utter them.
Seven men there were, chief-captains, fiery-proud,
These same did slay a bull : the bason was

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

A shield, black-bounden : and each man his hand
Dipp'd in the dark stream of hot bestial life,
And sware, crying dread names, the Lord of War,
The Battle-maiden and blood-ravening Fear,
That either he would sack by strength of hand
The town Cadmean and unbuild her towers,
Or, slain, make bloody clay of this land's dust.
And each did bind the chariot of the king
Adrastus with such token as might keep
His memory in far days with those at home
Who bare him, not without some fall of tears,
But, for their mouth, nought weak was found therein :
Those hearts were iron-proof : there burn'd the clear
Spirit of war unquenchable : they seem'd
Lions, whose eyes are even as gleaming swords.
And look, no lag-foot post is this I bring ;
Even as I went from them, they cast the lot,
How each must launch his battle at the gates.
Wherefore let chosen men, the city's best,
Be set by thy ordainment presently
To keep the issuing of the gates : for near—
The Argive host, full-harness'd, draweth near,
With trampling and with whirl of dust : the fields
Be fleck'd with flying white from the hot breath
Of horses. But do thou, O king, this ship's
Good rudderman, make strong her civic wall
Or ever lighten on us the hurricane
Immense of war, the roaring of the sea
That is of men, not waters. Nay, dispose
As shall be swiftest in the act, and I
Shall do my daylight office with as true
Curious an eye, that thou by clear report
May'st look beyond the doors and take no harm.

[*The Spy goes out in the same direction from which he came. The King, left alone, stands a moment deep in thought. Then he flings out his hand towards the images of the eight gods, and speaks in passionate appeal.*]

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ETEOCLES

O Zeus and Earth and gods that dwell with us,
O dark and strong Destroyer, my father's Curse,
I cry to you, break us not utterly!
Make not this city as a tree pluck'd up
By the roots, abolish'd, broken of battles, one
That speaketh the sweet speech of Hellas, homes
Where the old fire burneth; this free land, this town
Of Cadmus, bind it never in bonds of shame.
Be strong to save. Surely ye too are grieved
In all our grieving, for that city's gods
Do get most honour, which most prospereth.

[*Eteocles goes back within the palace. Enter from the side towards the interior of the city the Chorus of Cadmean maidens. They group themselves about the sanctuary of the eight gods and break into their chant. When the passage marked Str. I (Strophe I) begins, their chant is accompanied with rhythmical movements and evolutions round the sanctuary. It is to be noted that the chant before the Strophe begins is not uttered by all the Chorus together, but by different maidens chanting singly, beginning presumably with the Leader of the Chorus. How the parts are to be distributed between the different maidens is a matter for dramatic discretion.*]

CHORUS

Pangs have laid hold on me, terrors have loosèd my
tongue in crying,
An army is moved from its place, the foot of the foe
is a-stir:
Horsemen in ruining floods,
Multitudes, multitudes,
Horsemen are there in the van! Can I doubt, when
heavenward flying
Lo, the dark dust, the sure, swift, voiceless
messenger!—

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A thunder, a noise in mine ears ! Ye are smitten, plains
of my land,

Smitten of violent hoofs, and the wave o'erhangeth its
fall :

It breaketh, it roareth as waters that no bound can
withstand !

Stand ye in the path of destruction, O gods, O god-
desses all !

More high than the walls ascend
Shouts ; they are nigh, they are nigh,

The strong, white-shielded nation,

The people ready for war !

Who now shall save or befriend ?

What god of the gods on high ?

Oh, who shall show us salvation ?

What goddess of all that are ?—

Graven gods of the city, familiars and warders of it,

On the thrones of your peace establish'd, which shall

I seek to and pray ?—

Cling fast to the holy feet ! Why stand we and wail
without profit ?—

Lo, heard ye a ringing, a ringing, shields ringing, yea
or nay ?—

Will a time be ever for garb of entreaty

A time for the crown that craveth pity,

If it be not to-day ?—

Mine ears discern and know

A sound, mine ears a-strain :

Can one spear clatter so ?

Not one nor twain.

O Ares, O praise

Of our fathers, what thing

Wilt thou do to us ? Thou

That of ancient days

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Art this land's king,
Forsake it not now!—
O god of the helmet of gold,
Look down on this people, behold
The city that once by thy grace
Was glad among cities, the place
Which thou lovedst of old!

Come to our help, dear gods, that abide in the land's
high places, [Str. I.]
Strength of the city, come! We weak, we that
maidens are
Do cry to you, clasp you, entreat
With the moving of hands and feet,
Lest a day dawn dark and the shame of bondage cover
our faces,
For the city is set midmost in the wave and the welter
of war—
A wave that is driven of a wind, of a vehement spirit
and eager,
Crests aslant with the speed of their going—Ah God,
give aid!
O Zeus that dost work and wield
All things to the utterance, shield
These walls from o'erleaping, shield them, for the
Argive hosts beleaguer
Cadmus' builded burg, and the drawn sword maketh
afraid.
Death is set forth on his way, and a dread sound, lo,
for omen—
Jangling of bridles, shaken and gnash'd in jaws foam-
white!
There be seven strong men, the strongest and lordliest
of our foemen,
Set foot to the seven gateways, spearmen in harness
dight,
To every gateway a man, as his lot fell out for to
fight.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Splendour burning to battle, O Pallas, child of the
Highest, [Ant. 1.]

Fence of the City, defend it! and thou too, O King,
for to thee

The strength of horses, the strong

Fierce heart of the seas, belong,

Thy cunning shaft, that for doom in the silvery shoals
thou pliest,

Lift up for our loosing, Poseidon, from fear fast-bound
set us free.

Ares, Ares, awake for thy city! Is kindred for-
gotten?

Hast yet to thine own a kindness? Stand forth, be it
shown in our eyes!

Cyprian, Cyprian, aid,

In the dark of whose womb was made

This people's ancient mother: we, blood of thy blood
begotten,

Do come to thee with strong praying, do storm thy
presence with cries.

O King that art named of the Wolf, of a wolf's deeds
be thou doer:

Ravin and slay: turn back our groans on the head of
the foe!

And thou, O virgin-daughter of her that had Zeus for
wooer,

Daughter of Leto, look that the arrow be couch'd on
thy bow.

(Lo there! lo there!) [Str. 2.]

The rushing of cars, of cars at the gates, the rushing and
rattle!

Hera, Hera above!

The naves of the axles shriek, full-fraught with the
burden of battle—

Artemis, where is thy love?

And the tempest and torment of spears doth madden
the air under heaven:

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

O city, what travail is this ? To the edge of what doom
art thou driven ?
What end will God order thereof ?

(Nay, hark ! nay, hark !) [Ant. 2.]
The stony storm doth reach to the crown of the walls,
to shake them—
Apollo, merciful one !
In the doors is the clashing of bucklers, brass manifold
—who shall break them ?
O Son, whose Father alone
Is lord of the sanctions of war, when the balance of battle
is weighted !
Rise thou too, Blessed one, Onca, and succour the seven-
gated
City, the place of thy throne !—

O all together, strong to save, [Str. 3.]
All gods, all goddesses, that have
Lordship of us and guard our wall,
Give not this town up to the lust
Of men of strange lips, but, being just,
Regard these lifted hands and voices virginal.

Dear gods, to whom the city hath kneel'd, [Ant. 3.]
Ye her redeemers and strong shield,
That ye do love her, let men see !
Remember—and haste to her defence—
All the slain beasts and frankincense,
The old gladness of her feasts remember ye.
[Eteocles, habited as before, comes forth from the palace
and speaks, standing near the door :]

ETEOCLES

Nay, but I ask you, breed intolerable,
Is this well done ? Make these things for our help,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

For comfort to the people that abide
 In arms here, close shut up, that ye fall flat
 Before these holy faces of our gods,
 Wail, shriek ?—which things well-govern'd spirits abhor.
 Gods ! May I never house with womankind,
 Neither in evil days nor pleasant. Grant
 Woman her will, she is all frowardness,
 Nowise consortable : is she a-fear'd ?
 Then house and city have one plague the more.
 And now ye have moved the citizens to thrud
 The backward passage of flight : ye fling wild cries
 That strike men's hearts with palsy : yea by you
 The hands of them without have gotten strength,
 And we of our own selves are made a spoil.
 Henceforth let butt against my regiment
 Or man or woman or creature—what will I ?—
 Ambiguous, on such an one shall fall
 Sentence deliberate past escape, to die
 Stone-pelted by the popular hand. I say
 That the man's charge it is—let woman not
 Meddle herewith—what passeth out of doors.
 Abide within. Mar not our work. Ye have heard,
 Or hear ye not and speak I in deaf ears ?

CHORUS \

[Chanting and dancing, as also in the rhymed passages following.]

O son of Ædipus, fear [Str. I.]

O'erwhelmèd me, travail indeed.

Yea, I heard them, the rumour and beat

Of chariots and thundering feet,

The bolts of the wheels did I hear

In the fury and heat of their speed,

And the clash of the bridles that turn,

As a ship the hand astern,

Swift steeds to a man's desire,

The bits that were born for the fierceness of war in the
 fierceness of fire.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ETEOCLES

Yea so ! and found the mariner who ran
From poop to prow a way of help thereby,
When the ship strain'd against the breaching seas ?

CHORUS

Nay ! but to these did I fly, [*Ant.* 1.]
The images, visage and form,
Devisements of olden dread,
And my feet all feet outsped—
For I hoped in the gods most high—
When there beat on the gateways the storm
Of a heavy incessable snow,
And, with terror for wings, not slow
Was the cry of my prayer to ascend,
That these who are deathless would hold o'er the city
strong hands to defend.

ETEOCLES

Pray that the strange spear find a wall more strong.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Is not this also of the gods ?

ETEOCLES

The gods,
Saith the old word, do quit the conquer'd town.

CHORUS

Never may this fellowship of Strong Ones leave
us, [*Str.* 2.]
Nor the breath in me endure, to behold the shame
Of my city, and her sons in a loud night grievous
Wrapt round with the burning flame !

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ETEOCLES

Work thou not folly, calling on the gods :
For of Obedience Good-success is child,
Yea, of her womb Salvation : so men say.

CHORUS

True ; but God is mightier, past all divining ; [*Ant.* 2.]
Though a man be ne'er so straiten'd and in grief
held fast,
He will give for labour lightness and for cloud clear
shining,
And lift up his head at the last.

ETEOCLES

This is men's work—to traffic with the gods
In offerings and shed blood, when foes take hold ;
But thine to sit indoors and speak no word.

CHORUS

For the gods do stand us in stead, [*Str.* 3.]
In a city unravishèd,
Free folk, this day we abide,
And the towers endure, nor fail
When the beatings of battle assail :
Is there aught in my speech to chide ?

ETEOCLES

That ye adore these Great Ones is no blame :
But lest ye cause the people's heart to melt,
Possess yourselves and let not fear run wild.

CHORUS

A strange sound shook the street, [*Ant.* 3.]
All sounds of all manner in one,
Tumult and trampling and din :

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

And, lo, for the fearful feet
A sanctuary, a high throne,
A stronghold to shelter in !

ETEOCLES

Look, an word come of wounds, of stricken men,
Catch it not up straightway with tremulous cries :
For with such food is Ares fed, men's blood.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, hear I not snortings and stamp of steeds ?

ETEOCLES

Hear, but thy hearing utter not so loud.

ANOTHER MAIDEN

Grعانings from earthward ! round the city is death.

ETEOCLES

Let this suffice, that I take thought herein.

ANOTHER MAIDEN

I faint : the battery waxeth at the gates.

ETEOCLES

Peace ! noise thou nought thereof about the streets.

ANOTHER MAIDEN

Be true, O Fellowship, to our battlements !

ETEOCLES

The plague on thee ! be silent and endure.

ANOTHER MAIDEN

Keep slavehood from me, O our citizen-gods !

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ETEOCLES

Thou dost enslave thyself, and all the town.

ANOTHER MAIDEN

Almighty Zeus, thy bolt fall on our foes !

ETEOCLES

O Zeus, this womankind ! gift of thy hand !

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

A sorry kind, as men, whose town is spoil'd.

ETEOCLES

How ! touch these holy things and speak more bane ?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

My heart is faint : fear wildereth my tongue.

ETEOCLES

One light boon that I crave wilt thou vouchsafe ?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Declare it swiftly, and swiftly we shall know.

ETEOCLES

Be dumb, weak one, lest on our part be fear.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I am dumb, and bow me to the general doom.

ETEOCLES

This rather than those former words of thine
I would hear spoken. Also I bid thee stand
Clear of these holy forms, and pray one prayer,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Seemliest, that the gods fight on our side.
Listen withal my vows, and thereupon
Let ring the pæan divine and favourable,
The old use Hellenic, peal'd from burning breasts,
New strength to friends, taking away the fear
Of foemen. I, behold, speak to the gods
Which in this land be city-keepers, those
That rule the field, and those that oversee
The town's broad places, to the fountain-heads
Of Dirce and the flood Ismenus, yea
I do declare and vow : If good befall
And, peril past, the city breathe again,
Then, while ye gods behold your hearths run red
With drench of slain flocks and men gladden you
With blood of bulls, trophies shall be uprear'd,
The raiment of our enemies, the spoils
Of them that hate us, hung to glorify,
Spear-fasten'd, the inviolate sanctuaries.
After this sort pray thou the gods, not rife
In lamentations, not with profitless
Clamour of frantic breath, whereby no whit
The more shalt thou escape the thing decreed.
For me, I go to set six mighty men,
Myself the seventh, at the outgoings
Of our built girth, the seven gates, to be
Our foes' affronters in the heroic way,
Before the urgent feet of posts, the surf
Of flying words, do come on us and shake
Our hearts with fever in the prick of need.
[*Eteocles goes out in the direction of the interior of the city.*
The Chorus chant their second choric song, with
rhythmic movements, as before.]

CHORUS

Yea, O king, thy word I keep :
Yet no rest is, and no sleep,
To my heart's dark turbulence.
Thoughts that throng and will not hence

[*Str. 1.*]

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Feed the insatiate fire within :
Foes be round us, a strange kin,
Fell as basilisks to the dove
Fluttering wild and weak above
Her close-bedded care, and those
Watch, portentous nest-fellows.
Some to the towers' prostration
March, by city and nation,
Full tale—O maidens undone !
Some rain flint, and our fighters
Are smitten and see not the smiters,
Astonish'd with flying stone.
Yet the ways of your wit, are they scanted,
High gods, an ye will to save
The city that Cadmus planted,
His sons that bear glaive ?

To what land, what fields more sweet [*Ant.* 1.]
Far off, will ye lift your feet,
If ye leave wild war to spoil
This deep corn-engendering soil,
These Dircean wells that pour
Water of wholesome virtue, more
Than all rivers that have birth
From the god that shaketh earth,
Than all streams that run and shine,
Fed by the Sea-maidens divine.
Wherefore, O gods that defend us,
On the stranger let lighten stupendous
Ruin and blind affray,
Man-ravaging rout, shield-casting,
That ye get you a name everlasting
In the sight of this people to-day,
That your thrones be made strong, and around you
Prayer lift shrill music and moan
From a free folk that faithful hath found you,
O dread gods, our own.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

O the ruth of her falling and the pity ! [Str. 2.]
This most ancient, high, and honourable city—

Shall the spear prevail against her ? Shall she lie
Without helper, and the dry dust fill her mouth,
Foul her head, and strange children of the South

Have their will on her, made mighty from on high ?
Shall she lie as a slave, without honour ?

Shall her virgins be taken for a prey ?

Shall men lead them as horses in the way

By the hair, both the gold head and the grey,

The grey wife with her raiment rent upon her ?

A cry in the city ! the sore

Great cry of her spoiling ! her store

Is spilt ! Distress in the street,

Lowings of driven neat,

Confusion of flocks, and the thing that I dread at the
door!

And one goeth with but tears, but tears, for
dower, [Ant. 2.]

Ere in holy wise the freshness of her flower

Is ingather'd, on a bitter road begun,

Never more in her still chambers to dwell :

Beside her I dare affirm he fareth well,

That hath fail'd from among them that see the sun.

O the city, the woes that she tasteth

In that day, let him reckon them who can !

Seeing man getteth mastery of man,

And blood runneth where before blood never ran,

And those fling in her streets the flame that wasteth.

All foul behold her stand

With the smoke of her burning, fann'd

By the gust of a fierce god's breath,

Whose rage is a people's death,

The sanctities old confounding with violent hand.

A cry long-drawn in the lanes of the burg beset [Str. 3.]
With a girdle embattled, a nowise breakable net !

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

They slay and are slain and the quick sword hath no rest.

But your wailings who shall regard,
Small pitiful mouths blood-marr'd ?

As lambs ye cry, who were borne but now on the breast.

Where the prey is, there feet run :

Hand is foot's own fellow : one

Spoil-chargèd justleth another :

Who lacketh haileth his brother,

“ Be partner with me in the treasure,”

And less none willeth to have, nor even measure.

But the things that these ensue,

What guess can reach thereto ?

In the mire of the streets, a woe to behold, they
spill [Ant. 3.]

The good ingarner'd from orchard and glebe and hill,

And the eye is grievèd of them that kept the house,—

All kindly gifts of the Earth,

Not sunder'd in sort or worth,

As refuse shed on the surge tumultuous.

The young handmaiden, she too

Strange pangs hath proven and new,—

To serve the bed abhorr'd

Of the conqueror, some great lord

That shall take her a prey, to know

What the dark night teacheth, the hour of the strength
of the foe :

No hope to the end of the years

But a bitter fountain of tears.

[*Eteocles returns from the interior of the city : enter at the same time from the opposite direction the Bringer of Tidings.*]

A MAIDEN OF THE CHORUS

Friends, or mine eyes be mockers, or this man

The spy is of the host : he bringeth news,

So hot he plieth the carriage of his feet.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ANOTHER MAIDEN

Lo too, the king, the child of Ædipus,
At point exact to hear the runner's word
Cometh, his foot to no less labour strung.

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

Of all things yonder I can speak : I know
How, each to each, the gates by lot are fallen.
At the gate of Prætus, Tydeus even now
Belloweth ; howbeit to pass Ismenus o'er
The seer forbiddeth, for the sacrifice
Hath cross aspect : but Tydeus, being big
With lust of battle, clamoureth, as the dry
Gule of the dragon in the height of noon.
And the wise seer he girdeth with loud scorns,
The son of Æcles, as one cowering, false
Of eye, before the face of Doom and War.
And ever, as he crieth, three shadowing crests,
His helmet's glory, shake : beneath his targe
The brazen bells clash terror. And his targe
Displayeth to men's eyes a proud device,
A heaven of bronze, ablaze with stars, and bright
A full moon shineth in the middle shield,
Night's eye, that of the stars hath seigniory.
In such wise flown with bravery of his guise,
Beside the river he rageth, like a horse
Urgent with forced hard breath against the curb,
Whenas the trumpet maketh leap his blood.
Against him hast thou one to set ? What man
Can bear such brunt of fury, and hold the gate
Of Prætus handfast, when the bolts be drawn ?

ETEOCLES

I blench for no man's brave caparison :
Blazons can deal no wounds : nor crest nor bells
Have biting edge, unfellow'd with the spear.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

And for that Night, which on his targe, thou sayest
Is notable with burning signs of heaven,
It hath, maybe, for other than his foes
Bodement. For fall there may upon his eyes,
Even his that beareth those vainglorious arms,
The night indeed of death, night very and true,
And so the outrageous man be augurer
Against himself. For champion, I will match
With Tydeus the good son of Astacus,
A man right noble, one that reverenceth
The throne of shamefastness, abhorring all
Arrogant words, for ever he would be
Of shameful things unskill'd, but caitiff no.
From those Earth-sown whom Ares left alive
His root is—body of this land's body indeed,
Melanippus. The event of that shrewd play
Ares shall rule : but Right, that bindeth still
Where one blood is, setteth him forth, to ward
From her that gave him life the violent spear.

CHORUS

[*Chanting and dancing.*]

Confirm his arm and guide, [Str. I.]
That striketh on my side,
O gods, for, as Right will, he succoureth
The city : make vain my dread
To see spear-ruin'd and red
The body of one whom love led forth and gave to
death.

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

Him may the gods so guide in strength ! The gate
Electran, this is fallen to Capaneus,
A giant than that other furious one
Huger, whose vaunt outsoareth man's estate,
With threatenings breath'd against these towers, whereof
Not one may Fortune stablish ! For he saith

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

That, let God suffer it or not suffer it, storm
He will the town, yea stay not, though there fall
The flaming challenge of Zeus athwart his feet.
Lightnings and bolted thunders, these to him
Are even as noon-tide heats. For sign he hath
A naked man that beareth fire, unarm'd
Save that the hand showeth a blazing torch,
And, character'd in gold, he uttereth words
I go to burn the town. 'Gainst such an one
Send—nay, whom canst thou send? what man shall
stand
Before so vast a vaunter and not quail?

ETEOCLES

From such vaunt likewise is advantage bred.
Know, of the imaginations of vain men
The tongue is true revealer. Capaneus
Threateneth, intent to do, making the gods
A mock, and straining in vain gusts of joy
His mouth, this mortal rolleth up to heaven
Against high Zeus great swelling peal of words.
But sure I am that there will light on him,
As justice is, the fiery thunderbolt,
Made like in no wise to the heats of noon.
Against him—run his mouth ne'er so unpent—
Is one ordain'd of burning heart, the might
Of Polyphontes, one that holdeth firm
His trust of wardship, by the favouring arm
Of Artemis and grace of all the gods.
Say to whom else is fallen what other gate.

CHORUS

Riven be he and cast down [Ant. I.]
That boasteth o'er this town
Great things! may God's red bolt smite him and stay,
Or ere he overleap
The inviolate walls that keep
My maidenhood unbroke, and ravish me away!

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

That will I tell. The third was Eteoclus.
Him the third lot that leap'd from the bright bronze,
The shaken casque, appointed to beset
With battle the Neïstan gate. His mares
He maketh wheel, which in their frontal bands
Refrain'd, groan grievously, indignant, hot
To hurtle even now against the gate :
And fill'd with fiery blowings of their pride,
The nostril-tubes make shrill barbaric bray.
Nor humble at all the fashion of his shield—
A man full-harness'd setteth foot to climb
A ladder against a burg of foemen, fain
To storm it, heralding he too withal
In graven scripture, that even Ares' self
Were weak to thrust him from the battlements.
Against him also send one mighty of hand,
To keep the yoke of bondage from this town.

ETEOCLES

Send will I straight such man—and in good hour.
Nay, he is sent already, one whose vaunt
In his strong hands abideth, Megareus,
The seed of Creon, of the Earth-sown sprung.
He for no fury of horses or whinnyings,
How loud soever, will give back a-fear'd
And quit the gate, but either in shed life
Render to this dear land her nurturing wage,
Or, men twain and that city on the shield
O'erthrown together, will make glorious
With spoils uphung his father's house. Proclaim
Another, and spare not ; for thy vaunts I crave.

CHORUS

Go thou, and prosper thy path,
Whose breast for my house is a wall !
But on those let discomfiture fall !

[*Str.* 2.]

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

They are mad in their gloryings,
With their mouth they have utter'd great things—
May an eye, the all-righteous King's,
Be upon them in wrath !

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

The fourth, his roarings shake the gate whereby
Athene Onca hath her house—the bulk
And proud proportion of Hippomedon.
That orb immense, the compass of his shield—
To see him, how he swung it, for mine eyes
Was horror ; I say no less. Nor common hand
Was his, the artificer's, who wrought thereon
Such work—a Typhon bolting from his gorge
Black murk flame-shot, the vivid brother of fire.
And round the shield's great belly is basèd strong
For marge an intricacy of writhen snakes.
But the shield's terror his own dreadful shout
Transcended. Fill'd he is with the fierce flame
Of Ares, like to one of that wild rout
God-driven, raving unto blood : his eyes
Shoot death. What prudent man would make assay
Of such-like portent ? Yea, already fear
Exulteth at the gates, as lord of all.

ETEOCLES

First Onca Pallas, our most present friend,
Whose dwelling is by the gate, such violent pride
Abhorring, as a deadly basilisk
Shall spurn him from her nestlings : and with her
The son of Cænops, good Hyperbius,
Is match'd against him, strength with strength, well-
pleasèd
To track his doom out in the straits of chance,
For bodily frame and spirit and use of arms
Faultless. Yea, Hermes guided well the lot
That join'd these twain ; for man to man is foe,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

And adversaries the gods that on their shields
Shall shock together, seeing one man doth bear
Fire-breathing Typhon, and Hyperbius
Hath on his buckler Father Zeus, clear-throned,
Unmovable, his hand chargèd with flame.
And who saw ever Zeus discomfited ?
Such kindness of his god hath either man
For surety : and behold on our part is
The vanquisher, on theirs the inferior strength—
For is the arm of Zeus not mightier
In war than Typhon's ? Likely is it withal
That, as their gods, so will the champions fare.
By reason of his device Hyperbius
Shall find true Saviour him upon his shield.

CHORUS

He sure on whose shield is shown [*Ant.* 2.]
The oppugner of Zeus, the foe,
Dark birth of the Dark below,
Foul-favour'd, whom men hate
And the gods that have days without date,
He shall leave his head in the gate,
As a vile thing thrown.

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

So be it, as thy prayer is ! I proceed
And tell of the fifth man at the fifth gate,
The gate Borrhæan, where the mounded earth
Covereth Amphion of the seed of Zeus.
He sweareth by the spear-shaft in his hand,
Which his proud heart holdeth in honour more
Than the dread gods and dearer than his eyes,
Crying he will force the town Cadmean, yea
In God's despite. Such word is his, who grown
So goodly of the maiden limbs, that erst
Were light upon the mountains, doth advance
A front so lovely, liker boy than man.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

His cheek the unfolding flower of life hath made
Soft with new down, rich growth of the young blood.
But cruel, and as his virginal name nowise,
The heart is, and the eye fix'd in fierce glare,
Of him that standeth at the door : nor deem
He cometh without his glorying to the gate.
For on his targe of beaten bronze, the orb'd
Safe-keeper of his body, he did wield,
Made fast with cunning clamps, the city's shame,
The glutton of crude flesh, the Sphinx, a shape
Emboss'd and burnish'd, carrying under her
A man of the Cadmeans : sure on him
Shall most darts drive : nor seemeth he as one
That shall wage war by peddling measure or make
Frustrate so long a travail of his feet,
The Arcadian, Parthenopæus. Such he is,
And therewithal a stranger in the land ;
Yet, rendering Argos for fair fosterage
Good service, he doth breathe against these towers
Such threats as God, I pray, may bring to naught.

ETEOCLES

O would that as their thoughts are in those same
Ungodly gloryings, they might even reap
At the gods' hands ! That were indeed for them
Bottomless ruin and blank abolishment.
And lo, to match him too, the Arcadian man,
One not lip-valiant, though the vigilant hand
Shrewd work portendeth !—Aktor, brother born
Of him I praised but now. The tongue unyoked
With deeds he will not suffer to run free
Within the city and breed rank bane, nor him
To pass the wall, that on injurious shield
Beareth the image of that Abominable ;
Nay, break she through, pass she within, much cause
She will have, I trow, to curse her carrier,
When by the wall the blows ring thick. My rede,
An if it please the gods, shall be found true.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

CHORUS

As a sword that cleaveth the bosom asunder, [*Str.* 3.]
Stirring the hair with horror and wonder,
Is the word forth flung from a godless tongue,
The word unmeasured. Smite, stamp them as
dung
On the land, O Lord of the thunder !

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

The sixth I name, wise, reverent, ordinate,
Seer both and excellent in arms, the might
Of Amphiaräus. He, elect against
The Homoloïd gate, uttereth his voice
To upbraid with bitter titles manifold
Tydeus, the mighty lord, as manslayer,
Confounder of the state, to the Argive folk
Chief master of things evil, summoner
Of the black Vengeance, minister of blood,
To the king Adrastus evil counsellor,
Of all these woes begetter. Therewithal
He crieth, with eye uplift, against the prince
Thy brother, Polynices, making end
Upon his name, reiterate riddling-wise,
The *Man of Strifes*. He crieth aloud and saith :
“ Lo a good work in truth, a work wherein
The gods take pleasure, a work fair to hear,
Fair to be told of in the days to come,
That one should give the city of his sires,
The gods familiar 'mid his people of old,
To storm and havoc, having brought on them
The trampling of strange men ! What justice this,
To blast the well-spring of thy being dry,
The mother ? How, being captived, spear-abused
Through thy hot spirit, shall thy fatherland
Stand on thy part confederate ? For me,
My doom is to enrich this glebe, deep hid,
The prophet, in earth unfriendly. Up, my soul,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

To the battle ! for a fate I bode not void
Of honour ! " In such wise roll'd the great voice
Of the prophet, while the goodly orb, all bronze,
His targe, he wielded. And on all that orb
Sign was there none, for not the best to seem
His care is, but the best to be ; his soul
He eareth still, a rich field, furrowing deep,
And prudent counsels are the fruit thereof.
To strive with him war-crafty hands and strong
Find thou to send, I warn thee. Terrible
He is indeed that reverenceth the gods.

ETEOCLES

Ah me, what power confoundeth, hard to spell,
Things upon earth, joining the righteous man
With those most godless ? Nay, in every work
Than evil converse there is nothing found
More fell—that harvest, let none gather it !
Delusion is a field whose fruit is death.
For either one god-fearing setteth foot
Aboard with mariners of violent blood,
Some wicked practice, and so perisheth
With all that breed of men god-curst, or one
Righteous among the people of his town
Cruel to strangers, reckless of the gods,
Is taken in one snare with these unjust,
By the universal scourge of God brought low.
Even so the seer, the son of Œcles, he
A man sage, righteous, worthy, god-fearing,
A mighty prophet, mix'd with men profane,
Great mouths unbridled, feet that, in despite
Of wisdom, foot far ways beyond return,
Shall in their fall, God willing, be pull'd down.
Nay, he will not so much as try the gate,
I deem, not counting him or recreant
Or base of spirit : only he knoweth well
That in this fight his end must come on him,
Unless the oracles of Loxias

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Fail, without fruit : but the god's use it is
Either to hit the truth or hold his peace.
Howbeit, we will set a mighty one
Against him, Lasthenes, a door-keeper
That giveth grievous welcome, yea, a mind
Age-practised in the flesh of lusty youth,
Swift foot in onset, and a hand not slow
To pluck the blade bare from the shieldward side.
But for good speed, that cometh of the gods.

CHORUS

For our righteous pleading, high gods in
 heaven, [*Ant.* 1.]
At this gate speed and at all her seven
The city. We call war-travail to fall
On the strangers ! Blast them without the wall,
O Zeus, by the storm of thy levin !

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

Lo now the seventh at the seventh gate,
Even thine own brother, king, what bitter doom
His lips denounce upon the city and pray—
That he may set his proud foot on her towers,
Publish his name over the land, and lift
From triumphing throat the pæan of her fall,
Last front thee, face to face, and either slay
And, where thou diest, die, or hound thee hence
Living, who didst despoil him, and conform
To his own pain the fashion of his revenge.
With such-like shoutings his familiar gods,
The old worship of this land, the mighty prince
Polynices calleth to be favourable
Fulfillers of his prayers. A targe he hath
New-framed, a goodly round, and by smith-craft
Thereon a double emblem, for a man
In semblance as a warrior, of wrought gold,
Is by a woman led in seemly wise.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Justice her name she nameth—so the signs
Graven declare, *And this man will I bring*
From exile home and cause him to possess
His city and in his fathers' house once more
Walk up and down. Lo such as I have told
Be the devices they have devised, those men.
Of thine own prudence now look whom to send,
Nor fear to find thy herald slow to bring
Report. Thou only of thy prudence rule
This ship, our city, through the wildering seas.

ETEOCLES

O thou of God's wrath madden'd, by heaven's hate
Singled! Ah me, our lamentable house,
Seed stricken of *Œdipus*! Behold at last
They are fulfill'd, the curses of our sire.
Yet it were ill done to make dole, to weep,
Lest there be bred some more unbearable woe.
Only to him I say, well-named of strifes,
Polynices—we shall know right soon wherein
That his device shall end, if graven signs,
Work of the goldsmith, flaunting on his shield
In folly of mind distraught, shall bring him home.
Aye, had she part in this man's works or mind,
The child of *Zeus*, the virgin *Justice*, then
This thing might be. But neither when he leapt
Free from the dark house of the womb, nor while
He grew by nurture, nay, nor when he stood
In youth's full flower, nor when the gathering days
Enrich'd his cheek with hair, did *Justice* bend
An eye on him or know him from afar.
Nor will she now, I think, stand at his side,
Now in the harrying of his fatherland—
Justice!—nay then it were all-just to call
Her name a lie, she federate with a man
Whose wild will overleapeth every bar.
Having such trust, I go encounter him,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

I mine own self. For who hath right more just ?
Prince with great prince, brother with brother, foe
Shall meet with foe. Bring hither, I say, with speed
My greaves, bring hither the brazen things that keep
This flesh from brunt of spears and battering stones.

[Attendants bring the King's armour from within the palace. Some remove his long robes ; others do on his armour. Whilst he is being armed, the Leader of the Chorus speaks :]

Nay now, dear heart, nay, child of Œdipus,
Let not thy mood become as his whose name
Is hate and hissing. Surely enough it is
That Argive men and men Cadmean strive
In bitter battle, seeing for that blood shed
Cleansing may be ; but when the slayer and slain
Be of one blood, death is so horrible,
No multitudinous days make old the stain.

ETEOCLES

[Standing now fully armed with a great spear in his hand.]
If we must needs bear evil, let not shame
Go with it !—that one good is left the dead.
From evil join'd with shame honour is none.

CHORUS

[Chanting and dancing.]
What thoughts, O beloved, go through thee? *[Str. 1.]*
Beware the rageful mind—
Blood-lust that maketh blind !
Uproot, ere it quite undo thee,
The beginning of evil will !

ETEOCLES

For God is sore and urgent, let it run,
Rapt down the river of hell before the hate
Of Phœbus, all the seed of Laius !

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

CHORUS

O'er-fierce the desire is that stingeth, [Ant. 1.]
Devoureth thee, driveth thee on,
Till a murderous work be done,
Be done, and the dire fruit springeth
From the blood not lawful to spill !

ETEOCLES

Hate from love's fount, the black Spell of my sire
Cleaveth beside me, with dry dreadful eyes,
Bidding me snatch some gain, ere the end come.

CHORUS

Let her crying not move thee ! no mortal [Str. 2.]
For prudence shall hold thee unmann'd.
But, the gods with the gift of thy hand
Well-pleas'd, she shall pass from thy portal,
The storm-dark spirit of ill.

ETEOCLES

The gods ! they have forgotten me long since :
But of my dying glory and thanks redound.
Why stand I yet to palter with my doom ?

CHORUS

Its due to the dark hour render : [Ant. 2.]
Endure ! and thy weird at the last
May change, may veer in his blast,
And blow with a breath more tender,
That now is infuriate still !

ETEOCLES

Fury pour'd forth ! the curse of Ædipus !
O visions and shapes of sleep, too true ye were,
Too true, dividers of the heritage !

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Be ruled of women, though thy stout heart groan.

ETEOCLES

Speak within compass, in few words withal.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let be thy going to the seventh gate !

ETEOCLES

I am set : mine edge no speech can turn aside.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yet victory, though vile, God honoureth.

ETEOCLES

No man of war but must abhor that word.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Shall thy spear ravish thine own brother's blood ?

ETEOCLES

The gods send evil, and who can scape from it ?

*[Eteocles goes out, attended, towards the gate. The Chorus
chant their third choric song.]*

CHORUS

There is horror overshadowing, a strange god's
token, [Str. I.]

A god not as the other gods, a god by whose blow
The house is brought to nothing and the great house
broken,

For true is all her showing, and the burden of it woe.
She is Wrath ensuing hard

A father's prayer ill-starr'd,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

And strength is in her working, to fulfil
Each passionate curse the blind
King spake whilom, his mind
Being troubled by a visiting of ill ;
For lo, thy sons, O sire,
Strife ravageth as fire.

Of the heritage an alien is judge and awarder, [*Ant.* 1.]
One come from far away, from the Scythian breed
That beside a sea not theirs set in ancient time their
border,
A Divider of the substance, that heareth not men
plead,
A Chalybean, yea
That bitter thing, the grey
Hard iron, and the portion that his doom
Meteth of land to hold
Is even so much of mould
As sufficeth for a bloodless body's room :
But the broad lands and fair
They craved—of those no share !

When dead they lie, brought low [*Str.* 2.]
Brother by brother foe,
Through flesh his own the shaft of either thrust,
When, cruddled black, the blood,
Streams of one fatherhood,
Earth shall have drunk, conglomerate with her dust,
What spells, what rites can shrive the sin
Or wash them clean ? O house, new storms begin
To break on thee amain
With all the old, old pain !

Of old in very deed [*Ant.* 2.]
There clave unto this seed
A trespass, and God's ire hot on the trace,
Till children's children groan !
Seeing from the Navel Stone

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

In Pytho, from Earth's midmost mystic place
Apollo thrice did testify
To Laius, and bade him childless die,
If he would turn away
From Thebes the evil day.

But he, so strong did press [Str. 3.]
Persuaders' foolishness,
Begot—nay, his own ruin it was begot—
Œdipus, other none,
The father-slayer, the son
That sow'd the untouchable maternal plot,
The field where he was fashion'd, and bare
The burden, a root of blood. O doom-led pair,
Thwart, unblest bridal night,
With madness for a light!

Now blacken the seas, and run [Ant. 3.]
Billow on billow, one
Ruineth adown, and one behind doth swell
Hard on the labouring hull
His top three-fringèd, full
Of foam and noise and mischief huge as hell.
And what between, to keep secure?
A little space of wall. O heart, endure!
Heart, that may see this town
Brought with its proud kings down.

The end is come on us, [Str. 4.]
The end calamitous,
Full tale the curses utter'd of old have found.
Darkness hath hidden day,
And passeth not away.
O sons of men that eat bread of the ground,
Though lusty full your proud estate,
The ship must void to the seas all her inordinate freight.

Who had such worship of yore [Ant. 4.]
Before the gods, before

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Them that had fellowship in our city's fire,
And all whose feet did then
Frequent the ways of men
As Œdipus? whose goings did they admire
Like his, that fear'd not to withstand
Alone the fell man-ravening fiend, and saved the land?

When no more his thought [Str. 5.]
Was holden, when the horror in his flesh wax'd plain,
Twin ills he wrought :
For his heart in him was changèd by the hugeness of the
pain.

With that hand first
That had lighted on his father in ungentle wise
Himself he amerced,
Yea, bereft of more than children, of the seeing of his
eyes.

Then on his sons— [Ant. 5.]
Because wrath burn'd hot for the sustenance denied—
Fierce malisons,
The poison of the tongue, did he pour, yea cried :
“ With iron sheer
Divide ye the inheritance, divide ye and rend ! ”
That word, how I fear
Lest the lithe-foot Fury bring it true in the end !

[Enter from the battlefield the Bringer of Tidings.]

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

Be comforted, my daughters, fosterlings
Of tremulous mothers : take good heart : no more
Need this our city fear the yoke of shame.
The gloryings of the proud are gone to ground.
The city rideth in fair seas : for all
The storm of furious waters, she hath shipp'd
No brine. Her wall held steadfast, and her gates
We stopp'd with champions, man to man, that well
Have kept the charge assign'd. For the most part,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Yea at six gates, is perfect feature of joy,
But, for the seventh, he that triumph'd there
Was even that Dread One, *Leader of the Seventh*,*
The Lord Apollo, who hath visited
Home on the house of Ædipus the fault
Made of blind heart long since by Laius.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What strange ill hath befallen the city else ?

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

The city is saved, but her consanguine kings—

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who ? speak thy drift. My mind is troubled of dread.

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

With clear mind hark ! The sons of Ædipus—

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Woe's me ! my thoughts divine the dreadful end.

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

In no ambiguous sort pounded and bruised—

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are fallen ? thy word, how sore soever, speak.

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

The men are dead : the hands that slew, their own.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By hands of one flesh in one doom undone ?

* The seventh day of the month was sacred to Apollo.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

Earth hath drunk blood of mutual fratricide.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

One weird for both then ! one in bitter truth !

THE BRINGER OF TIDINGS

One weird, that wasteth this disastrous race,
Lo, here is argument for tears, for joy,
The city indeed in good estate, but these
Her chiefest, her two captains masterful,
Have made division at last of stuff and store
Even with the Scythian anvil-hammer'd iron.
Of land they hold so much for heritage
As a grave's length : so to the end foredoom'd
Their father's pitiless prayer hath borne them on.

CHORUS

[*Chanting*]

O God Most Highest and Helpers that hold
In the city upbuilded by Cadmus of old
Dominion and guard,
Shall the noise of thanksgiving and triumph abound
For the city that whole is, and savèd and sound ?
Or weeping rather for those ill-starr'd,
In battle famous and first ?
Of strife was he named, the hapless one,
And surely by strife are the twain undone,
Sore strife and a mind god-curst.

[*The Chorus chant and dance.*]

O thou black malison, full sum [*Str.*]
On the house of (Edipus thou art come !
My heart is struck with shuddering and strange fear.
As one god-fill'd and frenzy-led,
I have made a song to crown the dead :
Two piteous bodies marr'd in war,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Hearing, I vision. A wicked star
So brought together spear and spear !

It hath work'd to the end, unspent, unstay'd, [Ant.]
The dread prayer that a father pray'd :
Laius, thy sin remain'd, a bitter seed.
The city, trouble is fall'n on her :
No time can blot God's word nor blur.
Ye have wrought, O young hands lying cold,
A thing incredible ! Who foretold
Sorrow ? Lo, sorrow is here indeed.

[Men come in from the battlefield, bearing on two biers the
dead bodies of Eteocles and Polynices. The Leader
of the Chorus speaks :]

Yea, plain in presence. Eyes prove hearing true.

CHORUS

[Chanting.]

Crown twofold of calamity ! burden double !

Two fair kings in the murderous feud self-slain !
What should I say, but that trouble still with trouble,
Ill guests by the hearth, grim fellowship, remain ?
Speed ye the bark, O friends, with a wind of wailing,
To a tune as the pulse of oars beat the bow'd head :
Beyond the River of Dole she is borne of it, sailing,
The solemn bark, black-stoled, ungarlanded,
Untrod of Apollo, whereon sun never shined,
To a shore unseen, to the haven that all shall find.

[Antigone and Ismene come out from the palace : they
take their stations by the two biers, Ismene by that of
Eteocles, Antigone by that of Polynices.]

But who be these, by the bier, we see ?
Daughters of kings, Antigone,
Ismene, come with a joyless intent,
To weave for their brethren the due lament.
Soon, soon, I trow, there will flow on the air
From bosoms blown as a flower and fair

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Sorrow beseeming a measureless ill.
And ours is it still, as the old use will,
To hearken their descant, and chaunt in accord
The hymn of the goddess, the Terrible One,
Drear sound death-boding, for burden intone
The pæan of Hades abhorr'd.

O ye
Of all that gird them beneath the breast
Sisters surely the sorrowfullest,
I sigh, tears raining, and no false feigning
Is the cry of my heart distrest.
[*Antigone and Ismene chant the funeral dirge, accompanying their chant with rhythmic movements : the Chorus chants responses.*]

ANTIGONE

O minds amiss, [*Str. I.*]
Trustless of friends, unbent by blow on blow,
Your fathers' house, even this
The prey was of your spears—O iron forged for woe !

CHORUS

Yea, woe did these attend,
And woeful was their end,
Ruining their fathers' house in their own overthrow.

ISMENE

To the ground, to the ground [*Ant. I.*]
Ye have brought the house. Was this to reign alone ?
Bitter the prize ye found.
But lo the iron, at last, the iron hath made you one.

CHORUS

And true in very act
The pitiless Power exact
Hath made to stand the King your father's malison.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ANTIGONE

Home to the heart the strong hand thrust, nor
shrank, [Str. 2.]
Thrust home, nor stay'd :
Each launch'd a breast in that same mother-flank
As his first made.
O driven by more than man,
Wild spirits ! O withering ban,
And death-stroke by death-stroke repaid !

CHORUS

Those hands of so dread reach
Struck house and body through,
With rage astonying speech :
And the sire's word made true
Did mingle in one peace, till the world's end, the two.

ISMENE

One grief, one cry doth thrill the city ; grieve [Ant. 2.]
Her towers forlorn :
The deep earth grieveth, mother of men : ye leave
To the later-born
Those goodly things wherefor,
Poor hands, ye strove so sore,
And the end is a night without morn.

CHORUS

They have shared, in passion of heart,
And the shares equal are—
One part as the other part :
But daysman different far
Their friends had craved, nor kind nor fair the face of
War.

ANTIGONE

The iron hath wrought ; the side red staineth : [Str. 3.]
And, wrought with iron, for these remaineth

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

A room, a room dug deep,
Where king by king doth sleep.

CHORUS

Their house shall know them not to-morrow :
A cry goeth with them as they go—
True grief of grief and sorrow of sorrow,
Sharp grief, estranged from gladness, making flow
Tears from my heart's deep springs,
Heart faint with vain longings,
Tears for these dead, my kings.

ISMENE

What will ye say of them, all ye who pity? [Ant. 3.]
Dread things these did to the men of their city,
And strange folk, many a band
Ravenous, rued their hand.

CHORUS

O mother miserable, ill-fated
Beyond all women everywhere,
Beyond all mothers of men, that, mated
With her own child for spouse, conceived and bare
Of such bed sons, for whom
Their own wild hands wrought doom,
Hands fashion'd in one womb !

ANTIGONE

Aye, sown in one womb and uprooted, [Str. 4.]
Dismember'd in merciless mood,
For their hate drave them on and imbruted,
Till the long feud closed in blood.

CHORUS

Now is all strife still'd, and their life for ever
Is mix'd in earth and made one with her,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

One blood, no hate can at all dissever,
One blood : but a bitter arbiter
Was he that from dim seas came,
The stranger fashion'd in flame,
The sharp-edg'd iron ; yea, bitter and hard
The god that did measure and make award,
Ares, that stablish'd all
The ban prophetical.

ISMENE

God did give them their portion and granted [Ant. 4.]
An heirdom of pain toprehend.
Are they poor, when beneath them unscanted
Is a deepness of earth without end ?

CHORUS

O stem, behold them, who crown'd thy story
With the crown that was only a weft of woes !
For the conquering Curses exult and glory,
And the peal of their triumph is loud at the close,
Fierce shrill song over a race
Broke, scatter'd, swept clean from its place !
Confusion her trophy hath set for a sign
In those red gates, and the Weird malign,
One life on the other spill'd,
Doth rest with ruin fulfill'd.

ANTIGONE

Shrewd stroke didst thou give, and sustain.

ISMENE

In thy dying thy strength did appear.

ANTIGONE

With the spear hast thou stricken and slain,

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ISMENE

Thou art slain with the spear.

ANTIGONE

I bewail thee.

ISMENE

I weep for thy pain.

ANTIGONE

Wail on wail.

ISMENE

Tear on tear.

ANTIGONE

As a victor thou comest again.

ISMENE

Borne dead on a bier !

[*Wailings.*]

ANTIGONE

My soul is amazed with sore crying.

ISMENE

Sore the grief in my deep heart pent.

ANTIGONE

What dirge can suffice for thy dying ?

ISMENE

For thine what lament ?

ANTIGONE

Thy body no stranger hath broken.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ISMENE

Not strange is this form marr'd by thee.

ANTIGONE

Twofold is the grief to be spoken.

ISMENE

The grief that we see.

ANTIGONE

One sorrow is join'd to the other
And both are made fast.

ISMENE

For brother, united with brother,
Hath one grave at last.

CHORUS

O Doom of God, whose working is here, to show thee
A giver of grievous things! O imminent might,
The dead king's Shadow! and thou, by proof we know
thee
Strong, thou pursuing Wrath, black daughter of
Night! [Wailings.]

ANTIGONE

For exile he found instead—

ISMENE

Anguish hard to behold.

ANTIGONE

Scarce come, and his hand was red!

ISMENE

Safe home, and his days were told!

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ANTIGONE

The web of his days mid-riven !

ISMENE

Him too hath he ravish'd away.

ANTIGONE

O desolate race doom-driven !

ISMENE

Dim, desolate day !

ANTIGONE

Now sister by sister weepeth,
And double for each the dole.

ISMENE

For pain, as a swift beast leapeth,
Hath leap'd on my soul.

CHORUS

O Doom of God, whose working is here, to show thee
A giver of grievous things ! O imminent might,
The dead king's Shadow ! and thou, by proof we know
thee
Strong, thou pursuing Wrath, black daughter of
Night !

ANTIGONE

He doth know what her dark is and prove her.

ISMENE

And did not he too understand ?

ANTIGONE

When he came, not in guise of a lover—

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

ISMENE

Hand arm'd against this one's hand.

ANTIGONE

O burden of lamentation !

ISMENE

Sight lamentable to see !

ANTIGONE

Yea, woe for their house, for their nation !

ISMENE

Woe much more for me !

ANTIGONE

Who shall measure his labours and weigh them ?

ISMENE

Ah ! king great in woe as in grace !

ANTIGONE

Ah ! where in the land shall we lay them ?

ISMENE

Ah ! even in its kingliest place.

ANTIGONE

Through wild ways, O my brothers, ye errèd,
For a god set strange fire in your breast.

ISMENE

Where the grief of the father is buried,
Cometh new grief to rest.

[The bearers prepare to lift the two biers to carry the two

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

bodies to burial. Enter from the direction of the interior of the city, the Herald of the State, attended. At a sign from him the bearers put down the biers again, and the Herald, standing by the palace door, makes his proclamation :]

THE HERALD

The ordinance deliberate and decreed
By the prime council of the Cadmean state
My office is to publish : Eteocles,
For that great love he bare the land, shall be
Given to the earth's kind breast in burial,
Because, abiding in the city, he chose
Death : toward the olden sanctities of his race
Perfect in duty, without blame, he died
There where for young men death is comeliest.
Concerning him so my charge is to speak.
But for his brother—this dead thing that erst
Was Polynices—he must be cast out
Unburied, meat for dogs to ravin—ah,
The desolator of the Cadmean land !
Only some god did stop the way against
His wicked spear. So shall there cleave to him,
Though dead, the abhorrence of his fathers' gods,
In whose dishonour he brought in alien troops,
This man, and went about to take the town.
In recompense whereof the fowls of heaven
Shall give his body a tomb unhonourable :
Neither the pilèd labour of men's hands
Shall be his portion, nor shall any name
His name with shrill and lamentable cries,
Bare of the dead man's honour, not borne forth
By hand of friend. Lo, such their pleasure is,
Who hold command in this Cadmean town.

ANTIGONE

And to the great Cadmean lords say I :
Though no one else there be in all the town

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

With heart to help in this man's burial,
Yet will I bury him, I, setting my soul
Upon the hazard, careless, so I win
A grave for this my brother, unashamed
To break the order of the state, and stand
In such sort rebel. Dread constraint and dear
Liveth in that one womb whereof we came,
Of one unhappy mother and sire ill-starr'd.
Therefore my soul, full willing, taketh part
In this man's evil, who hath soul no more
For will : the living and the dead, one kin
To love's thought yet ! His flesh shall never glut
The wolf's pinch'd belly : let none dream such dream !
For I, albeit a woman, will devise
A manner of burial, earth delv'd and heap'd,
Bearing it lapp'd in byssus of my robe.
Myself will cover him : dream not otherwise.
Fear nothing : a way there will be, and a sure.

THE HERALD

Prove not thy strength, I rede thee, against the state.

ANTIGONE

And I rede thee : serve me no words of wind.

THE HERALD

Is not a people fierce, new-scaped from dread ?

ANTIGONE

How fierce soever, this man shall not lie bare.

THE HERALD

The city hateth, wilt thou honour him ?

ANTIGONE

The gods have cut him off from honour for ever !

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

THE HERALD

Because he brought this land in jeopardy.

ANTIGONE

Ill things were done him, ill he render'd back.

THE HERALD

Not against one he stretch'd his hand, but all.

ANTIGONE

Strife is the god slowest to end debate.
This dead man I will bury. Waste no breath.

THE HERALD

Good : be thou stubborn. Yet my word saith No.
[*The Herald, with his attendants, goes out in the direction
from which he came.*]

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS

[*Chanting.*]

Tower up and triumph, magnipotent
Weird ones and dark, that have riven and rent
The house of Ædipus, stock and stay !
Whereto shall I turn me ? what thing choose ?
O thou dead man, dare I refuse
Tears, or to walk with thee thy last way ?
Only I fear too much and shun
The wrath of the people. Surely one
Shall have surge of mourners about his bier :
But thou shalt pass with never a sigh,
Save one sharp dreadful desolate cry,
Thy sister's ! Hard law to hear !

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

[Another Maiden steps apart from the Chorus and is followed by a few others. These few take their station with Antigone by the bier of Polynices. The Maiden chants :]

As its pleasure is, let the city do

To them that mourn and make lament
For Polynices ! Lo, we few,

With her we fare, on his burying bent.
Aye, follow we will with him along :

For the whole kin suffereth in this death,
And Right, what is it ? The people's tongue,
As the wind's way, varieth.

[The bearers lift up the bier of Polynices and carry it out, followed by Antigone and the few Maidens who have joined her.]

THE LEADER OF THE CHORUS

[Chanting.]

With the other we, as biddeth Right

And the people's voice : for, under those
High Shining Ones and God's great might,

By him the city of Cadmus rose
Unscath'd : yea, lifteth she again

Her head from the swelling of the sea,
The storm and deluge of strange men,

Her saviour, this is he !

[The bearers lift up the bier of Eteocles and carry it out, followed by Ismene and the rest of the Chorus.]

NOTE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF THE GREEK NAMES

CLASSICAL names are pronounced in English according to a tradition amongst scholars which has become part of the general tradition of English speech. To pronounce names in accordance with this tradition is to pronounce them "correctly," but it should be understood that "correctly" does not mean "as they were pronounced by the ancient Greeks." Since gramophones had not been invented in the days of Æschylus, nobody now knows with any certainty how the ancient Greeks in any particular century pronounced their language. It is quite certain that their pronunciation was always very different from the "correct" pronunciation in English, and if an ancient Greek had heard Greek names pronounced in the way an educated man pronounces them to-day when speaking English, he would probably often not even have recognized what name was intended. In one respect the "correct" pronunciation, where words have more than two syllables, follows the ancient in putting the accent on what in the ancient pronunciation was a long vowel. Thus the name Polynices was probably pronounced by Æschylus something like Pollü-nee-case, the first two syllables short and unaccented, the *ü* pronounced like a German modified *u*, and last two syllables long. According to the English tradition the "correct" pronunciation is "Polly-nice-ease," putting the accent on *nice*. It will be seen that although the vowels and some of the consonants are so differently pronounced, the stress on the syllables does correspond with the long and short syllables in the ancient pronunciation. A scholar is thus quite justified in shuddering as at something horrible, if he hears any one pronounce the name Polynices with the last two syllables short, or if he hears any one pronounce the name of the poet as Æschy'lus. The "correct" pronunciation of the poet's name rhymes with "Peace kill us," if you put all the accent on "peace," and hurry over the other two syllables. The poet himself pronounced it something like Ice-khül-os, putting the stress on *ice*, and making the sound of an *h* between the *k* and the following vowel,

PRONUNCIATION OF THE GREEK NAMES

which was pronounced, as was said before, like a German *u* modified. Here, too, though the sounds in the "correct" English pronunciation differ so much from the original sounds in Greek, the stress comes on the right syllable.

All this having been explained, I proceed to give the "correct" pronunciation of the principal names in this play in alphabetical order—those at any rate where there can be any question :

Amphiaräus, *amfy-array-us* (accents on *am* and *ray*).

Amphion, *amf-eye-on* (accent on *eye*).

Antigone, *an-tiggo-nee* (accent on *tig*).

Aphroditc, *afro-di'te-ee*.

Ares, *air-reeze* (accent on *air*).

Argive, *g* pronounced as in "give," not as in "gipsy."

Artemis, accent on first syllable, the *e* short.

Astacus, accent on first syllable, the second *a* short.

Borrhæan, *borree'an*.

Capaneus, *cap-a-nuis(ance)*, leaving out the *ance*, and accenting *cap*.

Chalybean, *cally-bee'an*.

Creon, *cree'on*.

Erinys, *er-ry'niss*.

Eteocles, accent on first syllable, the two middle syllables short.

Eteoclus, accent on first syllable, the other three syllables short.

Hippomedon, *hippo'medon* (the *e* short).

Homoloïd Gate, *hommo-lo'id*.

Hyperbius, *hype'r-bius*.

Ismene, *is-mee'nee*.

Ismenus, *is-mee'nus*.

Laïus, *lay'i-us*.

Lasthenes, *la'ss-the-nees*.

Loxias, *lo'xias*.

Megareus, *me'g-a-ryoose* (last syllable not stressed).

Melanippus, *melani'p-pus*.

Neïstan Gate, *nee-i'stan*.

Œcles, *ee'k-leeze*.

Œdipus, *ee'dy-pus*.

Œnops, *ee-nops*.

Parthenopæus, *pa'rtheno-pee'us* (second syllable short).

Polyphontes, *polly-fo'nt-ease*.

PRONUNCIATION OF THE GREEK NAMES

Poseidon, *poss-i'de-on*.

Prætus, *pree'tus*.

Tydeus, *ti'de-use*.

Typhon, *tie'fon*.

Zeus, *zyoose* (to rhyme with "puce").

CAST

ETEOCLES.....

A SPY : A BRINGER OF TIDINGS

A HERALD

ANTIGONE.....

ISMENE.....

CHORUS

LEADER.....

FIRST MAIDEN.....

SECOND MAIDEN.....

THIRD MAIDEN.....

FOURTH MAIDEN.....

FIFTH MAIDEN

.....

.....

When the play is cast the number of the Chorus must be decided and their lines distributed among them. See the translator's note in the stage-direction on page 21.

In a reading Eteocles may be "doubled" with the Herald, or with Antigone, or Ismene; and the Spy with any other of the same three characters.

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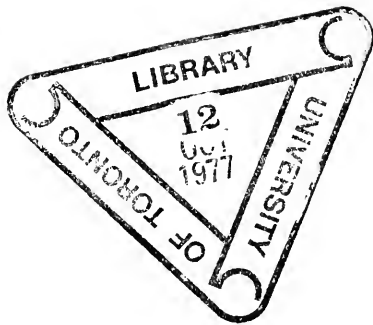
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